

Evaluating Electronic Sources

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Choose electronic information sources for research purposes
- Evaluate electronic information sources for research purposes

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

You will need photocopies for students of:

- **Student Lesson Summary**, p. 573
- **Teaching Model**, “All_News.Classzone.com,” p. 575
- **Practice Worksheets**, Levels A and B, pp. 576–577
- **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 578

Teach

1. **Evaluating Electronic Sources:** Remind students that when they are doing research on the Internet, they may often have too many sources to choose from.
 - To make the point, ask students to suppose that they are writing a research paper about the Statue of Liberty.
 - Have them predict how many Web-based sources they might find, using the search term: “Statue of Liberty.” (*The answer may be over five million Internet references.*)
 - Ask: How can you determine which ones to look at? (*Accept any answer as a basis for discussion.*)
 - Explain that they are going to learn some standards for judging which sources are the best to use.
2. **Teaching Evaluating Electronic Sources:** Pass out the **Lesson Summary** and guide students through the **Academic Vocabulary**. Then go over the **Here’s How** steps.
 - **Writing Idea and Search Terms / Keywords:** Write the example of a writing idea on the board. Then have students suggest search terms or key words to use in researching the topic. Write their suggestions on the board.

EXAMPLE

What is the history of the Statue of Liberty?

(*Sample: “Statue of Liberty History”; “Building the Statue of Liberty”; “Arrival of the Statue of Liberty”*)

- **Descriptions and Summaries:** Explain that the Internet search should turn up numerous Web sites, with brief descriptions of their content. Ask students to suggest the kinds of descriptions worth following up for research about the early days of the Statue of Liberty. (*Sample: those that mention the late 1800s or turn of the 20th C.; those that mention the Statue’s origins; those whose summary is entirely devoted to the topic—Statue of Liberty’s history*)
- **Type of Site and Author:** Point out that the author of a site may be clear from the address. Otherwise, it may be found within the titles and headings on the home page, or it may appear in the “Contact” page or as “contact information” on the home page.

- **Domain Name Suffixes:** Have students review the suffixes in the “domain name” of a Web site, and discuss the usefulness of each category. Write the available suffixes on the board, eliciting descriptions as follows in the chart.

.com	These are commercially available site-names, likely to be selling items; possibly helpful, but probably biased.
.edu	These sites are associated with an educational institution. These can range from reliable sites created by university departments to less-reliable elementary school classrooms, or even personal sites created by students.
.gov	All official sites belonging to federal, state, or local government organizations, use this suffix. They are likely to be reliable and objective, with wide-ranging information.
.net	Like “.com,” this domain suffix can be purchased by anyone. (It was once reserved for sites specializing in Internet connection.)
.org	This domain suffix is available to anyone too, but is generally used by, and was once restricted to, nonprofit organizations. These sites may be reliable—especially if the organization is devoted to scholarship, such as a museum, but they can often be biased.

- **Home Page Information:**old Explain that a home page usually gives a helpful overview of the site’s content, organization, and purpose. Language expressing **bias** or strong opinions is a sign that the site **subjective**, that is not balanced and **objective**. Tell students that the home page may also show the range of information included in the site, so that users can determine how relevant it is to their needs. In addition, students should make sure that the language of the site is at a level they can follow. Some very technical Web sites might require too much expertise to be practical for students.
- **Dates:** Tell students to check the date of the site’s creation and its most recent update. The first page of the Web site usually includes a brief statement showing when the site was “last updated.”

EVALUATING ELECTRONIC SOURCES, CONTINUED

- **Cross-Checks:** Explain that one way to get a quick sense of the reliability of a Web site is to check some of its information against that of your most reliable sources. For example, if a student has found what seems a useful .com or .org site, it might be a good idea to check its information against that from a .gov or .edu site or against a well-known reference source such as an encyclopedia site.

3. Guided Practice: Coach students in completing the following activities: First, prepare students to develop standards by writing the names of the following three organizations and their Web sites on the board. (NOTE: Only the National Park Service is an actual organization and site; the other two are fictional.)

EXAMPLES

National Park Service: nps.gov

Keeping Liberty's Torch Bright: libertystorch.org

Miss Liberty Hats: misslibertyhats.com

- Ask students to rank the three sources in terms of how valuable and reliable they might be for research into the history of the Statue of Liberty. (*National Park Service (highest), libertystorch.org (middle), and "Miss Liberty Hats" the lowest.*)
- Then ask students to explain their rankings. (*Sample: The National Park Service, with its ".gov" suffix, is a government organization and therefore is likely to be reliable and to have historical information about the Statue of Liberty. "Miss Liberty Hats," with its ".com" suffix, is a commercial site meant to sell tourist products. The site for "Keeping Liberty's Torch Bright" does not seem clearly related to the site's history, and its ".org" suffix does not reveal how reliable and balanced the site is.*)
- Distribute the **Teaching Model**, which displays part of the home page for the All News ClassZone's Web site. Have students identify the address of the Web site, check its most recent update, and tell what types of information are available on the site.

QUICK CHECK. On the basis of what they see on the **Teaching Model**, home page of the fictional site All_News.ClassZone, have students suggest a topic that could be researched within the site. (*Samples: the next Olympic Games; biotech research; the upcoming hurricane season*)

Practice and Apply

Activities on evaluating electronic sources appear on pp. 576–577.

- Assign **Practice Worksheet A** to students who need more structured activities.
- Assign **Practice Worksheet B** to grade-level and above-level students.

Answer Key: Practice Worksheet A

1. *c*
2. *Sample: The Ellis Island Immigrant site is likeliest to have the best information. The "mygrandadsstory" site might be appealing, but it might not contain extensive historical information. The "visitnyc" site looks as if it might be the Web site for a tourist organization to promote travel to New York City.*

EVALUATING ELECTRONIC SOURCES, CONTINUED

3. *a*

4. *b*

5. *Sample: The news article from the university research group is likely to have the most reliable and current information. The undated article might be out of date, and the organization that makes kits for children doesn't seem to provide recent news.*

Answer Key: Practice Worksheet B

1. *a*

2. *Sample: The National Football League Web site is an official Web site for the organization that organizes the Super Bowl, and so is likely to provide the largest amount of reliable information about the history of the game. The Best Ever Super Bowl Game site may have interesting facts but may focus on just a single game. The tickets site seems to specialize in ticket sales and so is unlikely to have historical information.*

3. *b*

4. *b*

5. *Students should specify the news event, supply some logical keywords, and explain that they would first check the most relevant and trustworthy sources, such as a well-respected newspaper, a university, or the government. If they visit other sites, they should be wary of political views that are slanted to one side or another.*

Assess and Reteach

Use these guidelines to determine if students need the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

- **Practice Worksheet A:** Students should choose the correct answers in items 1, 3, and 4 and be able to give valid justifications in *either* item 2 *or* item 5.
- **Practice Worksheet B:** Students should be able to correctly at least three of items 1–4, and give a complete and coherent answer to item 5.

For students who need reteaching, review the **Lesson Summary**. Focus on the **Here's How** steps, using items in **Practice Worksheet A**. Then have students complete the **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 578.

Answer Key: Reteaching Worksheet

1. *a* 2. *c* 3. *a* 4. *b*